PERSONAL NARRATIVES

OF EVENTS IN THE

WAR OF THE REBELLION,

BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE

RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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PROVIDENCE:
THE N BANGS WILLIAMS CO.
1880.

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FIRST CRUISE

OF

THE MONTAUK.

BY SAMUEL T. BROWNE,

PAYMASTER UNITED STATES NAVY.

PROVIDENCE:
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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

THE following paper was read before Rodman Post, No. 12, Department of Rhode Island, Grand Army of the Republic, at the request of whose officers it was written, in February, 1870. Especially was it suggested by Gen. James Shaw, Jr., whose efforts, made first in Rhode Island, to obtain and preserve records of personal experience during the war of the Rebellion, resulted, at his suggestion, in the issuing of a general order by the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic of the United States, requesting the officers of every Post in all the States, to secure from the members the writing and reading, and then to preserve, the records of personal experience during the war; the chief result of which custom would be to obtain a large and valuable amount of historical data, which must otherwise have remained unwritten.

Willing and wishing to comply with the spirit of this idea, the following paper was written. Subsequently, at the request of the Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society of Rhode Island, it was read before that Society and deposited in its archives. Any interest which may attach to it, must arise from the

fact that the vessel of which this paper speaks, was the first iron-clad that steamed so far away as the coast of Georgia, and braved the rough Atlantic in mid-winter; the first that had any contest with fortification or earth-work; and the first under which — and with serious injury to herself — a torpedo was exploded. She was thus the forerunner of all that great fleet of iron-clad men-of-war, now of such various design, of which nearly every navy of the world owns a part; and hence, the record of her earliest days and first service may be worth preservation. It is intended to be a simple and unadorned story, the character of the vessel, her service, and the time, justifying the detail of the relation,—and the fact of its being a narrative of personal experience, making unnecessary any apology for the seeming prominence of the writer.

S. T. B.

NAVAL ACADEMY, ANNAPOLIS, MD.,
August 31, 1878.

FIRST CRUISE OF THE MONTAUK.

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, DEC. 26, 1877.

THE echoes of the first guns that threatened destruction to the union of the American States, and sealed the harbor of Charleston into the hands of a prospective Confederate South, had scarcely died away when men's minds began to conceive and their hands to form new engines for offense and defense to be used upon the sea. Fragments of reports reached us, now and then, from the feverish and excited South, concerning the work of preparation going on there,—that armed and mailed craft were building that would sweep the seas; that vessels-of-war — late the nation's guard — were stripped of rigging and spars, braced and strengthened, clad with an armor of iron rails, and thus invulnerable, were almost ready to enter a contest that should help win the South an independence.

Too little heed was given to these reports of preparation, and on one mild Monday morning in March, 1862, the North was paralyzed by a message that flew from Fortress Monroe to millions of loyal firesides, telling of a strange vessel clad in shot-proof armor, that had steamed boldly in daylight from its covert at Norfolk, and in a few hours worked its own way of destruction and death among our vessels-of-war lying at anchor in Hampton Roads. She had sunk the Congress and Cumberland, noble vessels and manned by noble men, who stood by their guns while the water rose around them.

"No blanching—no faltering—still fearless all seem:
Each man firm to duty doth bide:
A flash! one more broadside! a shout—a careen!—
And the Cumberland sinks 'neath the tide.

"Bold hearts! mighty spirits! tried gold of our land!
A halo of glory your meed.
All honored the noble-souled Cumberland band
So true in Columbia's need."

But the shot from the doomed frigates bounded like peas from the sides of the iron monster. The

storm of shot and shell poured upon the strange craft from batteries both afloat and on shore, were unavailing to stop her terrible course, and only coming darkness saved the Minnesota and other vessels, and the immense supplies of government stores gathered at Hampton Roads. No salvation from this giant war-craft appeared. New York and Philadelphia were threatened, and in a few hours the whole nation was throbbing in an agony of suspense. But that night there was an arrival in those waters of a strange vessel-machine, that at once lifted loyal hearts out of the quicksands of despair and placed them on the firmer ground of hope, and to the stricken North it seemed like an interposition of Divine Providence. On the following day, when the mailed marine Goliath came forth, lo!—as to the astonished Philistines David appeared, so this insignificant strange apparatus that steamed out upon the bay, and which had been called in ironical drollery "a cheese-box on a raft." Its sling was a new monster gun, and its stone an eleven-inch solid shot, and the giant vessel was smitten and driven away, and never again ventured to attack.

This experiment of Ericsson's, called the "Monitor," though reaching Fortress Monroe by scarcely less than a miracle, from thenceforward became a certainty, and gave name to a large and important class of the naval marine. A number of vessels on this plan, but having many improvements resulting from the experimental fight of the Monitor, were immediately contracted for by the government, and in the autumn the first two were finished, and to one of them, the Montauk, the Navy Department assigned me. To a modest gentleman whose eye-balls and face were stained with powder, blinded and wounded as he was by the last shot fired from the monster Merrimac at his little Monitor, to John L. Worden, whose gallant fight had restored a nation's confidence, and who was now to command the Montauk, I reported for duty. I found the Montauk lying at a wharf in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and not yet quite ready for service, and in every point she was much an improvement upon the Monitor Her flat deck, not more than twenty inches above the water, and pointed at each end, reminded me of the shingle vessels I myself had launched in earlier years and in

more peaceful times. Her deck was protected by a double layer of iron plates, each nine feet by three in surface area, and an inch thick. Her sides were armored with five thicknesses of these iron plates bolted through and through on thick oaken backing, and extending to a point about four feet below the water-line, and there the armor ended, and a sharp right angle carried that portion of the vessel known as the "overhang" to the hull of the ship which was constructed of five-eighth inch iron plates.

The distinctive feature of the vessel was amidships, and consisted of a circular iron tower nine feet in height, and made of such plates as above mentioned, placed one over another, until the tower was eleven inches thick. These plates were firmly held together by massive bolts going through and through, on the outside the bolt-heads slightly rounded, and with the thread-end and heavy nut on the inside. The roof was made of iron plates perforated and placed upon railway rails, and the rails resting upon massive square beams of iron extending across the top of the tower. This tower, or "turret," as it became known, revolved upon the

faces of rings of bronze-metal fitted into a circular channel in the deck, and around an immense iron spindle or shaft that supported the pilot-house standing above the centre of the turret, and a miniature of it. The pilot-house did not revolve. It was fitted with funnel-shaped eye-holes nearly five feet above the floor of the pilot-house, which converged from the larger diameter inside, to an aperture an inch in diameter on the outside.

Within the turret were two guns, an eleven-inch and a fifteen-inch,—the latter ludicrously resembling a soda bottle,—its cartridges of walnut-sized powder varying from thirty-five to sixty pounds weight, and its missiles from a three-hundred-and-twenty-five pound unfilled shell, to a four hundred pound solid shot. Beneath the turret and guns was the turret-chamber, and here were small engines for working the turret, and also to operate the ventilating blowers,—for all of the supply of fresh air was drawn through the perforations in the roof of the turret, and forced through sheet-iron connecting tubes throughout the ship.

All the light admitted below deck, came through thick circular glass dead-lights set about ten inches below the surface of the iron deck, and at the bottom of small cavities, perhaps seven inches in diameter, called "wells." These dead-lights were open when in harbor,—and often even at sea in smooth weather,—but when engaged in a fight, the "well" was covered with a thick iron scuttle fitting snugly, secured below, and flush with the deck.

Through the snows of November and December we plodded over to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and watched the fitting out of this strange vessel in which we were to venture to sea, and by which we hoped to strike an effective blow to preserve the integrity of the Union.

None were more interested in her movements than a small gray-haired Russian gentleman with black twinkling eyes, whose simplicity and modesty won our esteem. He was a Naval Commissioner sent by the Russian Government to examine this new class of iron-clad men-of-war, and had the permission of our government to go to sea with us in the Montauk; and with his small, faded traveling-bag, he was always

earliest at the ship, that he might not be disappointed in going. This was Captain Lissovski, Commandant of the Cronstadt Navy Yard, and who, a few years later, came over as Admiral Lissovski, commanding the Russian fleet.

In due time the Montauk was ready for trial, and we steamed up the Hudson to a point near Fort Lee, and opposite Washington Heights, where were let fly the big shot and shell into the rocky cliffs of the Palisades, and the earthy bank beneath them, to the terror of the occupants of the shanties half a mile away. The discharge of forty pounds of powder from the ponderous fifteen-inch guns, was as if there had been a short peal of thunder near by, and yet it was remarkable in how slight a degree was the shock or concussion unpleasant to those on board ship. Indeed, we afterward became so accustomed to it, as to be able to sleep during the working of the guns; and, later, when off Forts Wagner and Sumter, and during the contest with those works in 1863, I often found myself waking from sleep into which I had fallen while sitting on top of the turret, immediately over the guns.

After other trial trips off Coney Island, both ship and guns promised to work well, and we put to sea. It was mid-forenoon of December 22, 1862, as we steamed down to Sandy Hook. There had been but one other venture like this. The great interested public knew but little of these vessels; and from steamers, and from all manner of sailing-craft, and from ferry-boats, and from the shore, we were watched with an anxious curiosity that told how the national pulse was beating.

At Sandy Hook the few remaining stanchions that held the lines around the vessel's sides were taken down, and the deck was absolutely clear. From the turret to the flag-staffs, fore and aft, a stout line was rigged, called the "life-line." The turret was "unkeyed," or let down upon its bed of bronze rings, and upon the big rubber band affixed to its base, to make it water-tight. To the extreme bow a heavy iron ring was fixed, and in this was a large shackle, from which two ten-inch hawsers, each one hundred and fifty yards in length, were passed to the steamer Connecticut, our tow and convoy, one hawser passing to her port, and the other to her starboard quarter.

In an hour we were off, steaming seaward. The Connecticut seemed huge compared with our strange craft low-lying in the water, and ran up her speed to about seven knots, our own vessel steaming at the same rate, just keeping the hawsers taut.

The preceding days had been so quiet that there was no sea, but the short, "choppy" waves, as we steamed into them, would overflow our deck, and then in a thin glassy cascade run off the sides, the sky was partially obscured by fleecy clouds, the wind was light, and in the late evening we went to our rooms and "turned in," with an assurance and confidence that seems surprising as I now look upon it. And so, quietly passed away the first day and night of the Montauk at sea.

Of course totally unaccustomed to service like this, my only warlike nights having been passed upon the hills about Washington, yet the movements of the vessel were so equable and slight, that I did not awake until morning. The wind had arisen somewhat during the night, and had occasioned a medium sea, so that as we steamed ahead, and the vessel's flat sides came against the waves, the water was

dashed into a blinding spray that came over us like a shower.

As there was no reason for going, so no one ventured on deck, but the top of the turret was our "forecastle," "midship," "quarter-deck," "lookout," and all. Tall iron stanchions curving outward, were fixed into sockets round the outside of the top of the turret, and around these was a broad band of canvas called the "weather-cloth," that afforded protection from the winter winds and the piercing spray.

The motion of the ship was very slight, and exceedingly buoyant and easy, the rolling not exceeding three to four degrees, and not affecting our filled cups and glasses at the table. During the day, the vessel had been "too much by the head," or too low in the sea forward, a difficulty that affected her speed, and that increased as the vessel was lightened amidships and aft by the consumption of the coal, so we put into Delaware Bay, coming to anchor off Lewes, where we remained two days, remedying the difficulty by moving shot and shell, and making careful examination of the ship; and finding every-

thing satisfactory, we again put to sea. It was a beautiful day, followed by a magnificent moonlight night. The big Connecticut, with its lofty masts—as we saw them—and its ponderous wheels, was immediately ahead; the restless, dashing, glittering sea all around us; and to us, standing upon this little iron tower and looking down upon the deck, which now and then seemed covered with a silver sheen as the sea shimmered over it, it was more like a vision from dreamland than an episode from daily prosaic life.

The next morning found us inside of Cape Henry: the hawsers were cast loose from our bow, and we steamed finely in to anchorage at Hampton Roads. The Monitor—to which our gray-eyed commander called our attention as we came in, and told us something of its famous fight,—lay just ahead of us. The Passaic, of our own class, was astern of us. The Galena, whose thinly clad sides were afterward penetrated at Fort Darling, was on our starboard bow; and some distance farther up the Roads, was the Ironsides, afterwards with us in the storm of fire and

shell at Fort Sumter. The beautiful Colorado was there, not far away; and English men-of-war were there, officers and men learning something of modern warfare.*

The days at Hampton Roads were beautiful; noticeably so was the first of January, 1863. An unruffled bay; a soft, balmy atmosphere; a blue, unclouded, fathomless sky;—nature never seemed lovelier in mid-winter; it seemed, indeed, as if its quiet was a type of that peaceful transition from bondage to liberty that made this day a new birth-day to four million souls.

The note of preparation here was incessant; every vessel had "steam up," and many of them could have slipped their cables and put to sea in a moment. Half-suppressed murmurs said we were bound for

*The duties and engagements of Captain Lissovski as special Naval Commissioner from the Russian Government to examine modern appliances of science to the prosecution of war, preventing his accompanying the Montauk any farther, he took his departure here, having won our esteem by his gentlemanliness, and his earnestness and zeal in studying and becoming familiar with every part and department of the Montauk, and his earnest sympathy with us in the war.

Charleston. The nation in impatient suspense waited for a prostrating blow upon that city.*

I doubt if the authorities at Washington then had any objective point to which these iron-clads were immediately bound.

At mid-day of January second, although since morning it had looked threatening outside, we went to sea. The Monitor and Passaic had preceded us nearly two days. The Connecticut, that was to have been our convoy, was ordered to Aspinwall to bring away the treasure left by the Ariel, and the steamer James Adger was substituted. Before we reached Cape Henry we found a heavier sea than we had before seen, but the vessel behaved excellently. Before night set in we saw we were meeting a gale.

*I am confident the force of iron-clads then available would have been insufficient for that purpose, and it would have been mad folly to have sent wooden vessels into that *cul-de-sac* whose sides bristled with four hundred guns, and the waters of whose harbor were filled with every variety of torpedoes; and I have held the opinion, especially since the first attack upon the forts in April, 1863, that even if the iron-clads had penetrated the harbor, and escaped the network of torpedoes, that with four hundred guns the hammering them to pieces would have been only a question of hours.

Every one of the seas swept over our deck like a deluge. The wind blew steadily and severely from the east, but did not seem to increase, and when night set in, it seemed we were having the latter and lesser half of the storm. Signals were exchanged from our turret and the paddle-boxes of the James Adger. The ghastly light thrown by the signals out of the darkness upon the seething crests of the waves; the roaring of the sea as it dashed against the ship and turret and submerged the hull; the cold spray thrust by the wind like needle-points against our faces; black clouds overhead, and shrieking winds all around; and we on this little tower twenty-one feet in diameter, with not even the ship's deck, nine feet below us, in sight more than half the time, (for nearly every sea rose within a few inches of our feet,) and nearing Hatteras;—made it an experience never to be desired again: yet once passed, to be valuable beyond any computation.

The increased unsteadiness of the vessel in the heavy sea, and especially our anxiety for her conduct through the night, prevented much sleep. Daylight revealed a leaden sky, a heavy fierce wind, and a

boisterous sea. At eight o'clock we were but a few miles off Hatteras, and even from our low lookout could now and then see the sea breaking upon the sandy cape. The James Adger was the length of our hawsers (about two hundred yards) ahead of us, and yet at times so heavy was the sea that she was hidden from us, even to her mast-heads. The vessel was now steadier than we had expected her to be, rising but little to the seas, but rather diving through them, or allowing them to sweep over her

At mid-forenoon the port hawser parted close to the James Adger's stern, and immediately drifted alongside of us, with imminent probability of its fouling our propeller unless we stopped, which, as we were towed by the steamer, we were of course unable to do. In the emergency there was no time to communicate with the James Adger. At the same time the starboard hawser hauled us around into the trough of the sea, and placed our screw in double danger. For a few exciting moments it seemed an even question whether our propeller would snap, or the sea submerge us. The big seas came under our overhang as if they would rip it from its solid union with

the hull, and with a shock that made the vessel tremble from stem to stern. At times the solid green water came within six inches of the turret-top. The quickest remedy was to cut the remaining hawser—but how!—green seas four—five—six feet deep were sweeping over the hull. Captain Worden called for a volunteer, and Acting Ensign Avery instantly offered to make the attempt, and with a stout line passed around him under his arms, and a battle-axe in hand, he dropped down from the turret on to the deck, and passing his arm around the life-line that was fore and aft, he struggled forward—three times swept from his feet in an instant by the green seas, he reached the extreme bow, clasped his arm around the flag-staff, and although a half-dozen times entirely buried in the sea, yet, after repeated blows, succeeded in cutting the hawser. Free now from the steamer, we succeeded in righting the ship into position, and after a couple hours' steaming alone, we finally reached smoother water, and again made fast our hawsers to the James Adger.

Toward the close of the day the wind became lighter, the sea smoother, and the day ended much

more pleasantly than it began. Before breakfast-time next morning we arrived off Beaufort, N. C., and by a mistake made by our pilot in passing inside the channel buoy, we ran aground, and were obliged to send in for assistance. We saw the Passaic at anchor inside, but no Monitor there. The steamboat Freeborn soon came out to our assistance, and discharging on board of her a sufficient amount of our shot and shell to lighten us, we steamed in to an anchorage inside.

We then learned more of the storm off Hatteras, the latter part of which we had seen, and out of which the Monitor never came. During the height of the gale, and when ten miles about southeast of Hatteras, the heavy seas tore the overhang from her hull, and she went down. From a note by one of the officers, I take the following passage:

"The gale at this time was raging fearfully; the water had risen to the grate-bars of the furnaces, and was extinguishing the fires; the ship was sinking; the sky was covered with masses of black clouds, and at three-quarters of an hour past midnight, on the last day of 1862, the Monitor disappeared in the sea."

Glory enough she had seen. Her beginning was in storms of shot and shell and the destructive power of man. Her ending was in the turbulent sea, with storm and tempest, as though only these powers of nature could fittingly attend the final hours of this vessel whose mission had seemed to be the salvation of the nation in its throe of agony.

We remained a number of days at our anchorage near Fort Macon. At dinner on Sunday, the eleventh of January, Captain Worden informed me that we were going to Port Royal. Here—thanks for Burnside's campaign—we received our mail via Newbern.

On Monday, the twelfth, Captain Worden showed me an order he had received from Washington,—consequent upon the loss of the Monitor,—to send the Paymaster, the funds and the accounts, on board the convoy steamer, when he again went to sea, and he asked me what I thought of the order. I told him I thought it somewhat ill-considered and unwise, so far as the person of the Paymaster was concerned; that it might be well enough to send the funds and accounts, but to send on board another vessel any officer at such a time, might occasion an uneasiness

and want of confidence in the ship that would be demoralizing to the crew, and possibly produce serious results, and that just now an establishment of complete confidence was precisely the thing desired and to be gained if possible. I said I thought it also evinced on the part of the authorities at Washington an apparent indifference to human life, that the retention of the person of the Paymaster on board would conceal, and I requested him, as a favor to me, to forego the execution of the order, so far as the officer was concerned, and permit me to remain on board, and he did so. I quietly packed up the funds and accounts, and went with them on board the James Adger, and only the Captain, the First Lieutenant and myself, knew anything of the matter.

On the afternoon of Saturday, January seventeenth, our own vessel convoyed by the James Adger, and the Passaic convoyed by the Rhode Island, steamed out to sea. At dark the Passaic and her convoy were eight miles astern of us, and we did not see her again. The wind was after us, and though there was but little sea, the prospect of a comfortable voyage was not flattering. During the night the wind increased,

the sea became turbulent, and the vessel uneasy. In the early morning I awoke and went out upon the turret, and found the sky clouded, the wind in the northeast and blowing fresh, and a heavy sea, though it was with us. All day long the wind was variable, and gave no token of settling. Many times while sitting in my room, reading or writing, and hearing the sea gurgling overhead, I have looked up and seen the rushing eddying water filling and dashing over the little well above my dead-lights, and realizing that there was two, three or four feet of water on the deck over my head, I would muse and think how strange is our human nature in its adaptability to all combinations of circumstance, and that I—that any one—could sit there in peace and quiet, and with no feeling of alarm.

Below deck it was always light enough to read or to attend to the daily routine of the ship. As none of the crew had occasion to go on deck, they remained below, reading, sleeping or smoking, or occupying their time in the many ways that a good and contented crew find to consume the day.

The ventilation of the vessel proved to be very fair. The partial vacuum caused by the rapidly revolving fans, or blowers, in the turret-chamber, drew the air through the perforations in the roof of the turret, to the fans, whence it was blown through iron tubes to the different parts of the ship, and finally passed away by the furnaces and smoke-stack.

On the evening of the seventeenth we were twenty-five miles off Charleston, and a few of the officers resolved themselves, on the impulse of the moment, into a council of war, and debated the question—whether we should not go in, open the harbor to our fleet, and take the glory to ourselves. On the evening of this day the sky partially cleared, and the wind clung to the north-of-west, but next morning found it again in the northeast, and a heavy sea running, every ponderous sweep engulfing the hull of the ship. In the forenoon we saw the tall trees on Bay Point, and soon the light-ship off Port Royal harbor came in sight. About three miles outside, we cast off the hawsers that held us to the James Adger, and steamed ahead into the harbor—the first Yankee

iron-clad that had steamed so far at sea, or so far penetrated the domain of the South.

As we steamed by the beautiful and stately flag-ship, the Wabash, with Admiral DuPont and his officers on the quarter-deck watching us, his crew manned the rigging and gave us three rousing cheers; and as we steamed on, it was taken up by the Vermont, the Ironsides, and other vessels-of-war as we passed them, and among which we soon came to anchor. The top of our smoke-stack came far below the rails of some of these vessels, and a little distance away our hull was scarcely discernible above the water; yet our monster guns, the beautiful and effectual mechanism of our turret machinery, the perfect command of the vessel and her apparent invulnerability, inspired a confidence there long needed. Safe and quietly at anchor, our vessel became the subject of visits on the part of army and navy officers, and of correspondents, and all who could get to see her, and the examination established the confidence her arrival had inspired.

The non-arrival of the Passaic caused some anxiety. Not until the evening of the second day after

our arrival, did she signal her appearing. By a gale that arose as we came in, she had been driven back beyond Charleston, and for thirty hours she withstood the fury of the storm, yet came in safe and sound.

Admiral DuPont had work for us to do, and we only remained at Port Royal for a few days. It had been our expectation that we were going to blockade or try the capture of the Atlanta. She had been the British steamer Fingal, and laden with arms and munitions of war, had run the blockade to Savannah, and had there been transformed into an iron-clad of the Merrimac type, the women of Georgia—it was said—having given half a million of dollars in gold to effect the transformation. Information obtained from Savannah seemed to justify the anxiety of the commanding officers at Port Royal for fear of an attack upon them by this vessel, which they had been as poorly prepared to meet as was the Union fleet at Hampton Roads when the Merrimac made the attack there. For months the Atlanta had been lying below Savannah, and now and then signals had been made from the Union garrison at Fort Pulaski

that she was moving down the river.* But the golden opportunity — to them — was permitted to pass, and when, on June seventeenth, accompanied by two steamers filled with spectators, she came to capture two of our iron-clads that were blockading her, she commenced a fight that lasted only fifteen minutes, and surrendered after being struck by five shot from the Nahant — an iron-clad of the Montauk class — and was brought a prize into Port Royal, where it had so often been a boast she was going only to burn and destroy.

Beyond Savannah, in the Big Ogeechee river, was lying the Nashville, a comparatively new and fine steamer, and sister ship of the James Adger. Seaworthy and fast, she had twice run out with cotton for Europe, and returned with material of war. It was known that she had been fitted and furnished as a privateer, and partially loaded with cotton, and under the protection of the Atlanta, was ready to

* There seems to be no reason to doubt that she might have gone to Port Royal, and destroyed all the vessels there,—a disaster that would have been second only to the first assault of the Merrimac.

run by our little fleet of gunboats that had so diligently watched and confined her. The Florida was then working destruction with American commerce, and the Oreto had been at sea only a week. Those who knew the Nashville could imagine the alarm and destruction she might occasion when once officered and at sea. To the Big Ogeechee we were sent to watch and, if possible, capture or destroy the Nashville. Again convoyed by the James Adger, though not using her as a tow, we steamed seaward. The sea was as smooth as a lake, and the day clear, mild and balmy as a southern spring. At noon we made the blockading fleet off Warsaw Sound, through which the Atlanta must pass if she ventured to sea, and tried to communicate, but the wind was too light to raise our signal flags. In the early afternoon we passed the Canandaigua, blockading Ossabaw Sound, where we were bound, and into which the Big Ogeechee flows. A heavy fog shut us in as we came to the narrow entrance to the Sound, and we were compelled to anchor; but the fog lifted after awhile, and we steamed ahead again, and finally came to anchor inside the Sound, where we remained that night, Jan-

uary twenty-fourth. The gunboats Seneca and Wissahicon, that had been blockading here some time, came to anchor near us. Our vessel was now entirely cleared for fighting trim. From stem to stern not a rope or a chain, or a bolt, in sight, nothing but the round turret and the big smoke-stack. Nothing remained to be done, in case of sudden action, but to close the battle-hatches — the work of a few seconds. An armed watch was stationed on deck, and the alarm-rattle laid in one of the turret-ports, ready for immediate use by the officer of the deck.

The bright winter moon that flecked the water with flashes of silver, never shone down upon a stranger looking craft. The officers below, in conversation, quietly speculated upon the probabilities of coming contests. The night passed quietly away. In the morning, one of the crew, Isaac Selby, was missing, and it was supposed that during his watch he must have stepped overboard, and the swift stream swept him under. At noon of the following day, January twenty-fifth, we moved up the river three miles, and again came to anchor. Here we received on board, from one of the other vessels, a pilot named

Murphy, a small, tough-looking Georgian, whose escape from southern authorities was one of singular interest, whose knowledge of those waters proved of immense value to the Union commanders, and whose whole war course established a loyalty as true as steel.

The Big Ogeechee is narrow, and very crooked, and low marshy banks border its sides. A mile or more across the marsh, and a little on the left, a spur of woodland conceals a location in the river known as Genesis Point, and here was the Genesis Point battery, better known, perhaps, as "Fort McAllister," named from Colonel McAllister, the sometime commandant, and upon whose plantation the fort was located. The river, which some distance of its course below the fort is hidden by the point of woodland, we could plainly see above the fort as it meandered through the marsh, which, with its tall, sedgy grass, extends on the right to, and beyond, the Little Ogeechee, even to the low bluff that forms the bank of the Vernon river, and on which the little hamlet of Beulah is located; near by, a battery of three guns, and not far away, a small

camp, possibly of Confederate pickets. Here and there, over this extended marshy basin, we can see columns of smoke arising, either from rice-mills or Confederate camps. Five hundred yards above our anchorage would have uncovered the fort from its concealment behind the point of woods, and bring us near a spot where is flying a white rag from the tip of a rod that sticks just above the grass,—a range-mark for the fort, and upon which their guns are bearing. It is more than a mile from the fort, and yet they had obtained such accuracy of practice, that when the gunboat Wissahicon went first to this point, she received the first shot from the fort directly in the centre of her hull.

The beautiful mid-winter day passed in making preparations for the attack on the morrow. We knew that their guns covered every rod of our approach, and were assured that there were electric and percussion torpedoes sunk in its channel; but the risks of these are the chances of war. At nine o'clock in the evening, two boats, fitted for a night reconnoissance, left the ship. Each had a crew of ten men and three officers, and every officer and

man was armed with revolver, rifle and cutlass. I accompanied the first lieutenant in the first boat. We shoved away from the ship, and with oars muffled with sheepskin, quietly pulled along in the broad shadow the grass cast upon the river. The sky was unclouded, and the moon shone clear and bright. Up and up we pulled, with no sound save the pattering of the drops as they fell from the oar-blades upon the river. We supposed the rebels had out scouts along the banks, and we watched for them, but none appeared. Up we continued, half the crew rowing, the other half with arms in their hands, until we reached a line of obstructions that diagonally crossed the river, and effectually closed it, with the channel passage through it skillfully concealed. A third of a mile beyond was the fort, its side toward us dark in the shadow, and the sentry pacing the parapet. Here we remained a while, listening and watching, but nothing broke the stillness of the night, and we returned, removing the range-stakes along the bank as we came across them, and before midnight we reached the ship.

On Tuesday morning, January twenty-seventh, we

were all up before light, and after partaking of a lunch of coffee and crackers we got up anchor, and soon after light started slowly up the river. Three of our boats were trailing astern from a spar lashed across the ship. When well underway, the rattle sounded to "quarters," and officers and men repaired to their stations for action. Captain Worden, the pilot Murphy and myself remained on the turret-top. I think it would have been quite impossible for any one to have comprehended and appreciated the occasion. I am sure we did not. A vessel of war of such type as the world had never before seen, vulnerable only in her hull below the water, steaming up a narrow, tortuous, strange river, with the assurance that in its bed were torpedoes, the slightest touch to which would explode them, and containing powder sufficient to destroy a dozen vessels like our own,—was a realization the full import of which we could not then comprehend.

When we reached the bend in the river where the fort opened to full view, it was clear day and the sun was just shining above the low tree-tops. A little less than a mile ahead was the fort, situated at

a sharp angle in the river, the bending of the river above it making of the land on our right a peninsula. Slowly we steamed against the current, and eagerly scanned through our glasses the massive proportions of the fortification, its banks covered with rich green sod, and the muzzles of the guns just visible, pointing at us from the heavily protected embrasures. Between the guns immense mounds of earth or traverses extended back into the rear, effectually covering the guns from an enfilading fire, to which by the approach they were partially exposed. Above the parapet floated the new ensign of this new dominion whose existence we had come to dispute.

It being unnecessary and imprudent to remain longer on the outside, we descended into the turret, and from thence climbed up into the pilot-house, and from the funnel-shapel eye-holes within, I watched the contest. Before eight o'clock we came to anchor about eleven hundred yards from the fort. In a few moments we let fly from the eleven-inch gun, a shell that fell a little short and disappeared in the river. Another was tried, that entered the battery and exploded with a loud report, blowing the soil in

every direction, and for a moment hiding a portion of the fort in the dust of the explosion. Then a shell was sent from the fifteen-inch gun,—the breech of which is so thick it prevents looking over it and out of the port, and hence has to be sighted by the eleven-inch,—and this imbedded itself in the parapet, and burst with a heavy deadened report, literally filling the air above the fort with earth and debris. The reports of our guns were like peals of thunder instantly let loose from confinement. Columns of fire fifteen inches in diameter, and a rod in length, flashed from the turret; immense bodies of dense smoke shot over the river; and but for its incessant rolling and unfolding looked like masses of granite. For a moment after the discharge of the guns, the turret and turret-chamber were filled with smoke, but the ventilating apparatus soon carried it away. The shock of the discharge, though forty pounds of powder were used, was not severe or at all injurious within the ship. Mr. Giraud, the officer having command within the turret, and considered one of the best shots the war produced, had found the exact range, and kept it. Instantly the rebels replied with a ten-inch shot

from their pet gun. A flash!—and then a big puff of smoke, out of which a tiny black spot appeared, that rapidly grew in size (or seemed to), describing a low arc, and then for an instant a big black ball was before my eyes, then quick as thought it disappeared, and with a heavy—thud! it struck square in the centre of the turret, making an indentation about as large as a soup-plate. It was evident from their firing the instant our guns were discharged, that they hoped to send a shot into one of our ports, but the immediate turning away of the turret to reload, prevented the working of their plan. We could watch our own shell as they emerged from the smoke and seemed rapidly to lessen in size and then bury themselves in the earth.

Again we gave them an eleven-inch shell that fell within the fort, and again a fifteen-inch that imbedded itself in the solid work an instant, and then exploded, powder, smoke, dust and earth filling the air, and leaving a rent in the work big enough to drive an ox-cart through. Occasionally a shell would scour the top of the fort, and then ricochet into the air, and fall a mile beyond in the dense wood, crush-

ing the trees in its descent. Sometimes a shell would pass through the face of the fort and burst inside. We could only see the rebels as they loaded their guns, and then at the discharge of our own they would drop as though shot, and rush to their bomb-proofs,—though we learned there was nothing that day in Fort McAllister that could truly be called bomb-proof.

We fired at intervals of six or seven minutes, alternating with our guns, for an hour, when the length of the intervals was increased to ten or twelve minutes. They answered from the fort briskly and with wonderful precision, remembering how small a mark our ship at the distance afforded. Not a shot from the fort struck farther from us than thirty or forty feet, and the shot and exploding shell threw up from the river columns of water that broke and descended upon the turret like showers of rain. To our astonishment, they would fire some of their guns out from the smoke of our exploded shell, when it seemed that the shell had struck precisely where the gun stood. We afterwards learned that these gun carriages were on rails, and the recoil sent the guns

to bomb-proofs in the rear, where they were loaded and run out again, or from which, as needed, they could be run into position and then loaded.

The rebels fired rapidly for an hour, when their firing began to slacken and become irregular, and apparently from only two guns,—and as we knew they could and had been using eight, we concluded six must be in some way disabled, and thought we could see through some of the immense rents and damaged embrasures, that a number of them were dismounted. For three hours we had thrown our big shells into their work. We had carried away their flag, blown into a shapeless mass the parapet and glacis that we had seen in the morning strong and smooth sodded. They still held out, and we began to wonder how long they could stand the explosion of fifteen-inch shell, for the number that remained in our magazine having suitable fuses was small. These were carefully used, and as we watched them, we knew that the havoc they made must be terrible. They continued to fire at us with a spitefulness and snap truly admirable. They had carried away one of our flags; riddled another; hammered

a score of indentations in our turret and pilot-house; broken off some of the bolts and driven them inside—and two of them, with the nuts attached to them, had passed within three inches of my head, that would have been crushed had they hit it; they had scoured our deck with scars two feet long, indenting and bending the iron plates; they had perforated our smoke-stack in many places, and cut its top into a ragged fringe; they had smashed our boats into splinters; still the efficiency of the vessel was not touched. In half an hour our suitable shell were gone, and solid shot and canister would not avail, and we withdrew. For some time they had not fired, but as we got underway and were moving down stream, they let fly at us four shot in rapid succession. A few of us had got out on to the deck from one of the smoke-stained ports in the turret. One of the shot fell at our right hand in the river, two fell short, and the fourth came screaming over our heads, and striking in the marsh beyond, threw up grass and mud and water, and ricocheting, flew off high into the air, as though it was going to Port Royal.

Officers and men, black and stained with powder-smoke, came from the turret and from below decks, out into the clear noonday air, to see the result of the fight, and to take a parting look at the fort, which not till now had they been able to see. We steamed down to our anchorage and made fast. A small steamer was immediately sent to Port Royal for suitable shell and fuses, and boats. In the afternoon the ship was cleared and cleaned of powder-smoke, and splinters, and fragments of shell (broken against our turret), and in early evening we went to rest, after a terrible strain upon the nerves of the watchers, and the muscles of the workers. Though the work might have been blown into worthlessness by us, or abandoned by the rebels, still with no co-operating land force, it could not be occupied by us, while when we withdrew it could be strengthened again and renewed by the rebels.

Contrabands occasionally came to us, some of them directly from the fort, and there was no flaw or contradiction in their story. They told us the fort was commenced before the war began, and they had

worked on it incessantly until it was exceedingly strong.

We learned from a number of refugees that our day's work had almost demolished the fort; that we had dismounted three guns; had killed two officers and a number of men; that two or three times the fort was abandoned; and that one of our fifteen-inch unexploded shell was exhibited in Savannah, exciting much wonder, and exerting an excellent moral influence.

The rebels stuck to their work splendidly, and we voted McAllister and his men a plucky company. It was impossible without exposing men to certain death, to remove the obstructions, and hence impossible for us to get up the river. The Nashville certainly could not get out. The chief end in attacking Fort McAllister was to put our men under fire, and thoroughly test the power of resistance and offense of our vessel.

In a week—on February first—we repeated this fight, going this time within six hundred yards of the fort, and close to the obstructions. We were struck fifty-six times. As often as we tore up the work in

this way, the surrounding country was levied on for workmen, and with the labor of the garrison, forty-eight hours made the work nearly as good as new.

Our object in coming here, the capture or destruction of the Nashville, had been so far without avail. Friday, February twenty-seventh, unexpectedly placed her in our power, and sealed her destiny. A little more than two weeks before, she came from her retreat near the bridge of the Savannah and Florida Railroad, and took a position under the guns of Fort McAllister, intending to take advantage of the spring tides prevailing then, and seize the first opportunity to slip to sea. But we had been waiting and watching for this very movement. One night she came down to Hardee's Cut, a short distance below the fort, hoping in that way to get into the Little Ogeechee, elude our vessels, and pass to sea; but one of the vigilant gunboats was there ready to receive her if she came through. They did not try it, and back she went up the river, and, as we learned from refugees, for some time was concealed in a bight in the river a number of miles above the fort, while the Savannah papers said she had

given the slip to our vessels, and gone to sea. As we expected, however, she came down again to the fort. For a number of days she had been trying, as it has since proved, to get up the river again, but a mile above the fort was a shoal, over which she could pass only at highest tide. She steamed up to the shoal and back again to the fort, a number of times. On Sunday afternoon, February twenty-second, she came in sight from behind the point of woods, went to the shoal, and again returned to the fort. She reminded me very much of a caged rat seeking a hole for escape, and finding none. On Friday, February twenty-seventh, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the gunboat Wissahicon signaled a movement on the part of the Nashville, lying near the fort. From the gunboat's mast-heads they could see what from our lower position was invisible. We bent our sight eagerly toward the point of woods, and soon discovered thin columns of black smoke ascending from behind the trees, as from a steamer's smoke-stack, and indicating a movement on the part of the privateer. For a while the smoke increased, and grew thicker, but finally seemed to settle down into a thin broken line, and so remained. The captain

and officers went down below to dinner. I remained on the turret, impressed that more was coming out of the matter. In twenty minutes the column of smoke began growing larger, and blacker, and thicker, and to move rapidly by the trees. Intently I watched the point, and in a moment, from behind the trees came the bow, foremast, then the smoke-stack, and main-mast, and there indeed, with the thick black smoke arising from her funnel and filling the atmosphere, and the ship steaming rapidly up the river, was the famous blockade runner, the rebel privateer Nash-ville. She steamed rapidly some distance up the river, then suddenly and instantly stopped, when her bow and the whole of the ship forward was abruptly lifted four or five feet, and there she remained.

I saw immediately that she had waited to go up the river until it was too late, and in endeavoring in the clear light of mid-afternoon,—and we had never seen her so plainly before, her coming and going having been in the duskiness of morning or evening,—had attempted to cut her way through the shoal, and had brought up aground, hard and fast. I immediately sent word below, and the captain and officers

came on deck. We went straightway to quarters, and for a while Captain Worden intended to go directly up the river. The gunboat Seneca was sent up to reconnoitre. She went up the Little Ogeechee to within a mile and a half of the Nashville, and by way of trial threw four or five shell at her, and in half an hour came back again.

In the meantime the smoke from the Nashville increased, crowding itself up into the air from out her funnel, a dense, expanding, sooty column, and rolling and curling into big black clouds that covered the sky and hurried the coming night, and telling us — how plainly — that they were making a life-struggle to get away. But it was of no use; her engines though a hundred-fold more powerful could not take her off whole. She did not move an inch. The tide, at the ebb when she ran aground, was now falling, and her condition was every moment becoming worse.

Captain Worden would have moved up to attack her if he had thought it judicious, but he saw that she could not get off until morning, with not the slightest probability of her doing so then. Night

was fast coming on, and he chose to wait. At dusk a little smoke, mingled with steam, was rising in thin clouds from her funnel. With our glasses we plainly saw men on her deck, at the mast-heads, and in her rigging, and we knew that she would be lightened during the night, if possible, and every expedient resorted to to get her afloat.

The night was mild and hazy, the moon obscured by passing clouds, yet no light was seen in the direction of the grounded steamer, nor indeed in any other direction, not even the usual rebel signal lights seen almost every night on the river above, or at the batteries on Coffee Bluff, or at Beulah; but we were confident they were working at her, and we prepared to make a demonstration in the morning, anxiously hoping that the bird we saw so nicely caught in the afternoon, might be still fast at the morrow's dawn.

At four o'clock the next morning, February twenty-eighth, all hands were up, and at five o'clock we had had breakfast and were all ready for the work which we had been earnestly hoping the day might bring us to do. It was a mild, pleasant morning, and the surface of the river was scarcely

broken by a ripple. At five o'clock and ten minutes we got up anchor, and in ten minutes more we were steaming up the river at the rate of six knots. The morning was just breaking, and it was not light enough to discover whether the Nashville was still on the shoal where last evening's darkness found her. We entered a bend in the river, and slackened our speed somewhat, and soon it became lighter, but we were behind the point of woods that we were watching with eager eyes, while our passage up the river was opening to our view the point where we hoped to find the rebel steamer still entrapped.

A little farther — and there she is — hard and fast! We can see a number of men on her forecastle, and considerable bustle and confusion. We steam on by Hardee's Cut, by a range-mark that is fifteen hundred yards from the fort, on to a point eight hundred and fifty yards from the fort, and at seven o'clock we come to anchor, with fifteen fathoms of chain from our windlass. The ship is heading up the river. As we look at the Nashville, Fort McAllister is on our left, eight hundred and fifty yards away, at the angle in the bend of the river. We lie close in to

the marshy shore. The Nashville is much more than a mile above the fort, but less than eleven hundred yards from us, across the swampy peninsula, and is lying with her full fair broadside toward us. The gunboats Wissahicon, Seneca and Dann are lying in the Big Ogeechee, a mile and a half below us.

From the level of our deck we can see nothing of the Nashville but the paddle-box tops, the smoke-stack, and topmasts; but from the inside of the pilot-house we can see the whole steamer, even below her guards, and nearly to the water. She is newly painted, and is the same light drab color as our own vessels of war. Her masts and spars look well, her rigging is taut, and her figure-head newly gilded.

At seven minutes past seven o'clock we fire our first gun (the eleven-inch) at the Nashville, and immediately they let fly at us from the fort three guns. But something is the matter there—for they all pass without touching us, as the shot from the fort have not hitherto done. The smoke from our own gun rises slowly, and we cannot see the effect of its shell. In thirty seconds we see another flash and

puff from the fort, and another shell flies by us. In five minutes we fire our eleven-inch again, and again the smoke conceals the effect of our shot. In five minutes a shot from the fort strikes our pilot-house, a ten-inch solid shot, and breaks into halves, one half remaining on top of the turret, and the other half falling down upon the deck. We then fire our fifteen-inch, and still the rolling cloud of dense blue powder-smoke shuts from our view the result of the shot. We then fire the eleven-inch, and can plainly see it pass just over the Nashville's after rail. In six minutes we fire the fifth time, now a fifteen-inch shell, and follow it distinctly with our eyes, and it penetrates the rebel's deck near the foremast. From the fort they are firing at intervals of a minute, occasionally a shot at the gunboats below, though beyond range yet as if they must do something except the incessant harmless fire at us, and still toward us they send most of their shot. But we pay no attention to the fort, not returning any of its fire. Again we send a shell which the smoke hides from us, and again another is hidden from us. The fifth shot, that entered near the foremast, has done its work,

and we can see a column of whitish-gray smoke issuing from her fore-hatch, and in five minutes more tongues of flame leap out with the smoke, high into the air.

We cannot see her guns, and we suppose they must have been taken off during the night. As we came to anchor, we saw a number of persons get over her starboard side, the one opposite us, after which we saw no living soul on board.

We fire again, and the shell flies crashing into her hull in front of her paddle-box, and when the smoke of our gun has slowly drifted away, we see the fire breaking through the deck amidships. Another shell smashes through the paddle-box, and explodes at the base of the smoke-stack, which comes tumbling down upon the hurricane-deck. Though Mr. Giraud cannot see the Nashville, yet he is making splendid shots from our guidance.

We fire our last shot at three minutes after eight o'clock, having fired fourteen times; and as the smoke clears away from this last shot, we can see the flames bursting out around her paddle-boxes, issuing in great sheets from the fore-hatch, creeping up the foremast

rigging, and gaining aft. The fog which has been slowly gathering around us, now entirely shuts us in, and we cannot see thirty yards. For more than half an hour we are thus enclosed, when the fog rises enough to show us the Nashville with the fire rapidly gaining, and smoke-stack fallen partly through the port paddle-box. Fearing that under cover of the fog our ship might be boarded by overpowering numbers, the anchor was gotten up at forty minutes after eight o'clock, and we turned head down stream. From the fort they had not fired in twenty-five or thirty minutes, but as we started away, they let the shot come thick and fast. We learned afterward that the garrison had been changed since our last visit, and only the fact of new men at the guns could explain why few shots from all their firing hit us—but really it made little difference whether they hit us or not.

We steamed slowly down, and in a few moments the fog had risen, revealing the Nashville enveloped in flames. The fire came out from the opened seams in her sides, from around her smoke-stack base and her masts, from between the ribs and braces of her

iron wheels, and fore and aft; and from stem to stern she was shrouded in fire. At thirty-five minutes past nine o'clock she blew up, with a smothered rumbling report like distant thunder. The explosion was amidships, and the column of flame and smoke, like the discharge of a huge gun, shot up into the air, higher than her trucks, carrying with it the charred and broken timber and burning bales of cotton. It was a sight that once seen can never be effaced from the memory. In a few moments another explosion of less extent took place, shattering and opening the stern of the steamer. Her masts, that had stood through it all like black spectres, now toppled and came down; the flames gradually lessened; the long black column of smoke wound its way up to a cloud which had grown until it overshadowed the heavens; and nothing remained but the stem and the iron wheels.

A mass of smouldering embers was all that remained of the noted blockade-runner, the terror of our northern merchants, the destroyer of the Harvey Birch, the rebel pirate Nashville.

We continued on slowly down the river. I came

out of the pilot-house and was standing on the turret; men and officers had just been relieved from their stations and were gathering on deck. The port quarter of the vessel was carried, probably by the action of the current, against the bank of the river, and quite near a small piece of cloth flying from a stick in the grass, which the captain had noticed as we went up the river and called the pilot Murphy's attention to it, who said,—"I think I'll give it a wide berth, sir! I am afraid it's a torpedo." As we now touched the bank, I was conscious of a jarring motion, as though she had struck the bank quite heavily, but nothing more. So it was noticed by most upon the deck. There was not much more commotion in the water than might be made by the propeller when close in shore. It was, however, supposed in the fire-room below to be a torpedo, and before we moved half a dozen rods away from the bank, the chief engineer came up from the fire-room and said to the captain,—"That was a torpedo, sir! it has blown a hole in her hull under the boilers, and the water is within three inches of her fires." We were just passing the gunboats, whose crews were in

their ships' rigging cheering us. Captain Worden shouted to their commanding officers to send him men and buckets. The boats were dropped from their davits to the river; the men jumped into them; buckets and pumps were tumbled in; and in fifty seconds boats were alongside, and men, buckets and pumps on board. The tide was about an hour ebb. Captain Worden turned to the pilot, and said to him, "Murphy, can't you run me ashore here in some good place?" The pilot answered, "That I can, sir!" All the remaining steam was crowded on, and after moving about half a dozen lengths, we ran ashore along the river bank, where the vessel's keel bore evenly. The pressure of the ship upon the bottom filled the cavity and stopped the leak; the ebbing tide left us high and dry; pine plugs with gutta percha were driven into the chief opening and the cracks that radiated from it; the ship was bailed out; and when the rising tide came in again and lifted us, the rent seemed closed and the ship as good as ever.

The rebels had intended undoubtedly to explode the torpedo under us as we went up the river, that

side being the right and proper one to take as we moved up, and the torpedo must have been located as recently as the previous night. But the perception and prudence of our pilot saved us. Had the rebel plan succeeded, the torpedo would have sunk us in the river, the gunboats could not have gone near enough to harm the Nashville, and she would have been saved to the enemy, and possibly succeeded in getting to sea. But the Montauk was preserved; was able with her patched hull to join in a fight with Fort McAllister on the following day, with three other monitors that arrived that afternoon; was at Charleston from the beginning to the end of the assault on the forts; and came out of the war the veteran monitor, bearing more than four hundred honorable scars.